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IN MY OWN WORDS

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green

State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English

April 21, 2017

Professor Lee Nickoson, First Reader
Professor Bill Albertini, Second Reader

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Finding Yourself Through Reading and Writing

Reading and writing are two of the most personal experiences anyone can have. The books you choose to read shape who you become in the academic world, and shape your writing style in many ways. Everyone has a genre of writing that they excel in, or are particularly interested in, and it is through this type of personal academic experience that one can explore who they are. This is where they figure out how to express themselves, finding their own voice. I have spent the last two years pursuing the Master of Arts degree in English, specializing in Teaching, because I want to be able to help students find their voices. This program has helped me to become a better teacher in the classroom, and has pointed me in the direction of better resources to continue this growth process. Learning is a continuous adventure for both teachers and students. As teachers, we owe it to our students to lead by example, always showing that we are hungry for knowledge no matter where we are in our lives. My main goal in pursuing this degree was to broaden my understanding of teaching English, and expose myself to more teaching strategies that would enable me to expand the thinking of my students in terms of relationships between English and the cultures of the world around them. A common thread that runs through the portfolio projects I have chosen is the focus on reading and studying literature as one of the most important strategies in the classroom. This is emphasized, in one way or another, in each piece, because reading helped to shape my own voice, and I want students to experience the world that literature opens to them.

The projects I chose for this portfolio were selected based on level of interest in the subject, and how well I thought I would be able to improve and expand the works. They show my interests as a student and a teacher, in both literature and the importance of writing in the classroom. The first revision step was to modify each piece based on the original professor's

comments and suggestions for improvements. This revision also included a rethinking of the audience and writing situation, considering how this has changed from the original purpose of the piece. Once this was complete, each piece was sent to my first reader with specific questions to guide the next revision. The second revision step in each of the projects was to expand the works with added research appropriate to the style and purpose of each project. Next, it was sent to the first reader for a final review. Final changes were made to the documents, and the portfolio draft was created to send to my first reader for a final approval. Then, it was sent to the second reader for final review and approval.

Over the course of the program, each class presented opportunities for research and implementation of new teaching strategies. One of the strategies I found to be most successful, both as a student and a teacher, was that of learning to bend traditional grammar rules in different writing genres. Allowing my students to practice with this new strategy allowed them to feel comfortable enough expressing their raw selves in all kinds of writing, and I saw their voices really come alive in their work. As a student, I think this was important for me too—I got to rediscover my own voice, feeling less pressure to make sure every single mark on the page was correct according to some archaic “rules.” Instead, I got to focus on what I wanted to say, and how I wanted the reader to respond to my writing. Students see authors “breaking” these rules all the time, and getting published. Allowing them more freedom with their writing made them feel less pressure and more confidence.

Regarding literature, one of the most important methods I learned was how to use literature, or literacy, circles. This showed me how to get students interacting with the texts through their classmates’ interpretations, and how to help them hold themselves accountable when it came to getting the readings done. My students experienced a new lesson in

independence, helping them to gain confidence in interpreting and responding to different genres of literature. These methods, among others, helped to guide my work in this program, and helped to determine which pieces were chosen for this final portfolio. Another common theme seen throughout the pieces is the idea that language is important in every area of our lives, and learning to work with it in different ways can lead to a world of more possibilities and opportunities.

The first project “Vanishing Voices” was originally a response paper to the book, *Vanishing Voices* by Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine. The main idea in this book was that language extinction is a debilitating phenomenon that is currently plaguing our planet. Language death occurs when a language, Latin for example, stops being acknowledged and spoken. Language death also occurs if a people go extinct, or are forced to assimilate to a new culture, language included. The problem with this is that the rest of the world loses any valuable information that could have been shared with us had the language not gone extinct. This is the idea that caught my attention, and made this paper appealing to me as a portfolio piece. My whole life, I have been fascinated by the idea of conservation, and have been active about educating myself in environmental conservation and the consequences associated with species and habitat extinction. Threatened languages, and the heavy consequences of language extinction, never crossed my mind before I read this book. The interest level I had in reading and writing about this topic made the paper an easy pick for the final portfolio.

Right away, I knew that expanding the paper was necessary, shifting the focus from book review to deeper research on the topic of the book. The original suggestions from the professor for this class were to expand this paper, focusing on small island nations that are particularly at risk of language extinction today, and what the effects would be globally. In order to shift the

focus of the paper, I also needed to eliminate any large sections on my opinion of the book. Instead, I included research from other sources on this topic. In the beginning of the paper, I wanted to make a clear connection between language extinction and species extinction, and develop this comparison throughout the paper. I also wanted to make a clear thesis, which was different from the original paper: that the current level of extinction facing languages even today is damaging to the wealth of knowledge available to humans globally, limiting our access to valuable information. To develop this idea throughout the paper, I expanded, mostly by including more researched information from various sources. This changed the focus and audience of the paper, which made it necessary to change some of the language to be more formal as well. Regarding any other minor changes, editing needed to be done to reword sentences, and check for any convention errors or typos. Overall, this was one of my favorite pieces to work with, because it allowed me to research an intriguing topic and expand on it. I wanted to reflect my interests through the portfolio works, and this piece specifically allowed me to do so.

Project two, “Literature Gives Us the Words that are Stolen by Troubling Times,” assesses the idea that literature is an important topic of study, and it should be treated with the same respect in the academic world as the technological fields. There seems to have been increasing challenges to literature as it is taught in the classroom, because many people are finding it hard to come up with a “reason” to teach it in the first place, naming the sciences as a much more important course study than literature. In this paper, my main objective was to highlight the benefits of teaching literature, discussing the importance of keeping it in the classroom, as it is an aid to humanity. Teaching literature should be regarded in the same respect as teaching in the technological fields, and this paper aims to give that reason why. I chose this paper to work with because learning through literature is empowering. It is necessary to fight to

keep the topic in school authentically, without hindering it with unnecessary state and national standards that may steer students away from liberal arts. I argue in this piece that learning through literature allows students to engage in empathy, something that will help them throughout their lives. Literature gives them the words to speak when they can't find them on their own. This idea is very important to me, and it is the main reason why I chose to include this piece in my final portfolio.

Regarding changes in this piece, the original comments from the professor stressed that I needed to be more specific with *how* literature was helpful to students. More examples were necessary to increase overall clarity of the argument in this piece, and to expand. To make the document more cohesive, some sections of the paper were rearranged. Each comment made directly on the paper from the original professor was addressed, and the main suggestion present in most comments was integrated into the rest of the paper—to be more specific. Again, with this piece, rewording and a conventions check was necessary to make sure that it was in portfolio condition. The professor also suggested that I add in a few comments from authors we had studied in that course, which would add to the credibility of the work. To adhere to this suggestion, I added some quotes from authors to validate my assertions in the section in which the original professor recommended, as well as throughout the rest of the paper. The main objective in revision for this piece was to make my argument as clear and credible as possible, as it advocates for something I find extremely valuable to society as a whole.

The third project, “Writing Through Reading and Hands-On Activities” was selected as my pedagogy piece. In this piece, the main objective is to discuss writing strategies that can be used in the classroom, which focus on reading and hands-on activities. The focus of the unit I describe here is informative writing, in terms of state standards. Breaking down this unit into

nine weeks, I describe how I incorporate the standards, regarding classroom activities and assignments, with rationale for my choices. I chose this as my pedagogy piece, because in it I express again the importance of using reading strategies in learning to write. I also describe benefits of hands-on activities, something I have found to work extremely well in the classroom. This piece outlines specific techniques I use, which relate to my overall teaching philosophy.

One suggestion from the original professor for this paper was to include what I see as challenges to my approach, and how those challenges affect the strategies used in the classroom. Based to this suggestion, I added a new section on challenges in accordance with the recommendation. I also incorporated NTCE Beliefs, CCCC Position Statements, and WPA Outcomes, to further contextualize the piece, according to my first reader's suggestion. Throughout the document, I added clarifying information in any area I found to be unclear, and I eliminated anything I found to be distracting from the overall focus of the work. I also rearranged some sections, and edited for convention errors and typos. I chose this piece for my pedagogy focus in the portfolio because I think that it highlights my overall approach in the classroom to get students engaged in anything we are learning. Students need to be able to express themselves in different ways, and providing different opportunities for them to do so can be rewarding. I believe that teaching through reading is very important, as seen in the previous portfolio piece, and I believe that students revel in letting their creativity come through in hands-on activities.

The fourth and final project in this portfolio, "Obsessed with Gender: Gender Roles and Insanity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*," was used as my research piece. Throughout the work, the focus is on the mental instability present in the novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*, and the extent to which this is correlated with gender in the performative sense. In the

Victorian time period, it was common to associate mental illness with the female character. This was often reflected in the literature of the time. However, many female authors began to challenge this idea through their own works, often under a satirical guise. Mary Elizabeth Braddon is one of those female authors. Throughout this piece, I tie these ideas together through research on the criticism of this novel in terms of gender and mental instability in the Victorian Era. I chose to include this piece in my portfolio because I find the association between gender and mental instability fascinating. Reading about how feminism was present in the past through literature is very intriguing. Therefore, working on this piece kept my interest and allowed me to look deeper into some concepts I only scratched the surface on in the original paper.

The major change for this piece, like the others, was additional research and clarifying points. I rearranged some material, but most of the changes included adding text in various places. I wanted the document to remain focused on the novel, but read more like a criticism with added research both on the time period as it relates to these ideas, and on the effects of the novel within the time period and today. Of course, rewording and proofreading needed to be done, to make sure the document was as clear as possible, and was free of convention errors as well as typos.

The classes I have taken in this program have allowed me to study and implement different teaching styles in the classroom, giving me experience in techniques I find to be the most useful. Overall, the running theme seems to be centered on the idea that literature plays an important role in the classroom, one that has recently been taken for granted by the academic world. I find that finding new and creative ways to incorporate literature in the classroom, by studying it yourself as well as studying different techniques, provides more opportunities to reach students and engage them in the learning growth process.

Project 1 Final

Vanishing Voices

As time goes on, change is inevitable. We do our best to make sure those changes lead to positive outcomes, but sometimes the changes that occur are not in anyone's best interest. One unfortunate outcome of the many changes humanity has brought about is language extinction, brought forth by many human-related actions. In the book, *Vanishing Voices* by Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine, the authors discuss the phenomenon of language extinction, or language death. These are the terms describing languages vanishing from the planet, permanently. It is something that happens close to the same rate as species extinction, but it seems that species extinction gets all the public's attention, leaving dying cultures to fend for themselves with essentially no aid. Many of the "smaller" languages (languages spoken by a small number of people) just don't attract sympathies from our society. They may even go unnoticed by many linguists. As evolutionary changes continue to propel us through time, many language enthusiasts have begun to accept and even celebrate changes to language, as accepted grammar rules are bending and breaking. Even so, this evolutionary effect could also mean language extinction, dragging ancient culture down with it. The current rate of extinction facing languages today is damaging to the wealth of knowledge available to humans globally, limiting our access to valuable information. Our current society that devalues the importance of language diversity will only continue to perpetuate the loss of knowledge. Language diversity should be acknowledged and celebrated, to conserve the languages that could ultimately lead to life-saving information in our international community.

Of course, there are many examples of languages that have gone extinct in remote areas one might expect; small island nations, and small cultural groups, have lost their languages due to both human and natural causes. Because these cases seem to be isolated, something many people have never been directly affected by, it is difficult to spread the word about the damaging effects of this phenomenon. As it turns out, there are hundreds of languages that have gone extinct in our own backyard, in the United States. “[...] language death is not an isolated phenomenon confined to ancient empires and remote backwaters,” (Nettle and Romaine, 4). The bottom line is that there are numerous communities alive today that claim a different language, and so, a different culture. Several of those languages and cultures are threatened for various reasons. “Some linguists believe the number may decrease by half; some say the total could fall to mere hundreds as the majority of the world's languages - most spoken by a few thousand people or less - give way to languages like English, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Indonesian, Arabic, Swahili, and Hindi. By some estimates, 80% of the world's languages may vanish within the next century,” (Woodbury, *Linguistic Society of America*). Many people do not mark language conservation with high importance. Perhaps if more people were aware of the dangerous implications of culture extinction through lost language, they would be more willing to preserve this knowledge at the risk of it being lost forever. Losing languages can put the global environment at risk, and cost the planet access to life-saving knowledge.

The two biggest causes of language extinction and endangerment in the past were the rise of agriculture and the industrial revolution. These events, which triggered the move of scores of Europeans westward, also triggered forced extinctions of languages and people. Forced extinctions of people, or mass murders, causes something called sudden language death. And it is as simple as it sounds; if there are no people to speak the language, the language dies and the

culture is lost with it. On the other hand, there can be a gradual death of the language, with a slow replacement or integration of another language. This kind of language shift can be forced or voluntary. If it is forced, the people speaking the dominating language will outlaw the smaller language until those people “choose” to speak the dominating language. If the shift is voluntary, that means that the people will choose to speak the dominating language because it is beneficial for them to do so, primarily for economic reasons. Nettle and Romaine share an opinion about these shifts, saying that there is actually no “choice” here. Whatever language is most profitable to be learned will be learned. People may have chosen the dominating languages, but they did not choose the circumstances under which they had to choose. “By shifting their language, they were attempting to gain symbolic association with, and entry to, the sphere of the developed economy, much in the same way that young women in Oberwart, Austria chose German over Hungarian because they perceived the former to be of greater economic value,” (Nettle and Romaine, 127). The main argument in this case is that people should not have to give up their mother tongues to learn a dominating language like English in order to be “better off” in a world where technology advances and the business sector call for English to be spoken. If anything, our global society should be more serious about requiring multi-language learning in schools. If more students were inclined to become multi-lingual, there would be a larger recognition and appreciation of the value of language, understanding that each language has something unique to offer the global community.

It is important to note that just like species extinction and formation, new languages are being developed just as they are going extinct. The rate of extinction, however, is now higher than the rate of development. Not all small languages are at risk and not all large languages are safe—it depends on location and how easily they can be learned. Pacific island nations are at risk

of losing their languages, and so, their culture, due to loss of land. The land acquirer in this case is global climate change. With rising sea levels, island nations are having to relocate inland, and now, are having to relocate to other countries. Kiribati, for example, is an island nation that has been losing land to sea level rise for years. For them, part of the preparation for the future includes learning English as the primary language, so that they may assimilate to new countries as they will inevitably have to do (Powell, Harvard News Office). Imagine how much language would need to change in this case, and how difficult it would be to hold on to a language and a culture, when the environment forces you to accept another. The state of a language could change very rapidly. “A small change in the social environment, such as the loss of control of resources to outsiders, can have drastic consequences which pass right through to the domains of culture and language,” (Nettle and Romaine, 79).

Today, some people believe that a world with a unified language would symbolize a world unified in peace and understanding. However, there are many more consequences to losing language diversity than would be benefits. “As a uniquely human invention, language is what has made everything possible for us as a species: our cultures, our technology, our art, music, and much more. In our languages lies a rich source of the accumulated wisdom of all humans,” (Nettle and Romaine, 14). Because of this, losing languages and cultures means that we lose the potential for human knowledge. For example, “Cherokee words exist for every last berry, stem, frond and toadstool in the region, and those names also convey what kind of properties that object might have – whether it’s edible, poisonous or has some medicinal value,” (Nuwer, “Languages: Why We Must Save Dying Tongues”). The potential to lose sustainable practices, history, and medicine development alone should be enough to convince people that diverse languages brings benefits to people, not conflict and misunderstandings. From what history has proven, “Being

linguistically different condemns the Other to being savage,” (58). This is the real misunderstanding. “As stated by A. Wurm, co-author of *The Atlas of World’s Languages in Danger of Disappearing*, ‘Each language reflects a unique world view and culture complex, mirroring the manner in which a speech community has resolved its problems in dealing with the world, and formulated its thinking, its system of philosophy and understanding of the world around it. In this, each language is the means of expression of the intangible cultural heritage of people, and it remains a reflection of this culture for some time even after the culture which underlines it decays and crumbles, often under the impact of an intrusive, powerful, usually metropolitan, different culture. However, with the death and disappearance of such a language, an irreplaceable unit in our knowledge in understanding of human thought in world view is lost forever,’” (*Extinction of Languages, Erosion of Cultures*).

If we have any hopes in this current beginning of an environmental movement to enact some real change for the sake of the planet, we will need help from as many people as possible. This includes people who know trades and practices that others don’t—people from different cultures, who speak different languages. “Because language plays a crucial role in the acquisition, accumulation, maintenance, and transmission of human knowledge concerning the natural environment and ways of interacting with it, the problem of language endangerment raises critical issues about the survival of knowledge that may be of use in the conservation of the world’s ecosystems,” (Nettle and Romaine, 27). People do not have only a single identity and should not only be defined by a single language—people should be able to choose the language they want to express their identity in. People want to preserve their culture and their environments. The solution is to empower local people to have more control, not force everyone to speak the same language, assimilating to one single culture. Languages are conduits of human

heritage, they convey human cultures, and they show different ways to interpret the world. “Just as ecosystems provide a wealth of services for humanity – some known, others unacknowledged or yet to be discovered – languages, too, are ripe with possibility,” (Nuwer, “Languages: Why We Must Save Dying Tongues”).

There is something that has been done in a half-hearted attempt at “preserving” language and culture. It is an act that many people have believed to be a step in the right direction toward this preservation, particularly in the United States with Native Americans. There are Indian Reservations in the US; small amounts of land with no real potential for success that have been set aside for these cultures, presumably to preserve their culture, language included. The Europeans that came to the west initially wanted to use the Native Americans as slaves, but they kept dying from disease. Now, the reservations for Native Americans are almost like an attempt to show sympathy, but in reality, it’s almost like incarceration. They are only allowed to thrive in their native culture and languages in these small areas. Nettle and Romaine state: “[...] languages are tied up with local systems of knowledge and ways of life. Ways of life can only persist where the community has control over its resources and activities. Development practices have tended to suppress indigenous ways of life and the languages that they sustained, by displacing people, liquidating their resources, and changing their patterns of production and exchange, rather than sustainably improving their standard of living. Furthermore, these practices have been based on outsiders’ knowledge, outsiders’ crops, outsiders’ languages, and outsiders’ priorities. Indigenous systems of knowledge and language have been downgraded, or treated as backward relics to be erased by western-style education,” (Nettle and Romaine, 165). With more land being allotted to various federal needs, Native American rights being stripped, and western religions continuing to force ideologies, it seems that the American “culture” is becoming to

Native American culture what sea level rise is for the Pacific island nations such as Kiribati.

Indigenous peoples should at least have control over the small pieces of land they were given, after the larger was taken from them. “It is not about setting indigenous peoples aside in isolated reservations, or expecting them to go on completely unchanged. It is merely about giving them real choice about what happens in the places where they live,” (Nettle and Romaine, 171).

Sustainability and language preservation are intertwined, and that means biodiversity and linguistic diversity are linked. In this sense, any conservation efforts which define biodiversity with intrinsic value, should also think of language diversity in the same sense, working to preserve endangered languages alongside endangered species. Nettle and Romaine leave us with an implied call to action: “As events of the past few years and the present and various parts of the world show, our global village must be truly multicultural and multilingual, or it will not exist at all,” (Nettle and Romaine, 204). Preserving our planet has many necessary steps and components—the secrets that lie underneath language diversity may give us the answers we are looking for.

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Project 2 Final

Literature Gives Us the Words that are Stolen by Troubling Times

As a topic of study, literature has been scrutinized in recent times by scholars and the general public alike, all looking for a particular kind of significance in relation to real world applications. Those outside the literary world, the *non-readers*, dissect various forms of literature, searching the depths of the pages for the *meaning* of it all. They may be convinced that the coursework labeled “literature” is not on par with the sciences and other realms of technical study. Literature studies may be belittled in relation to the “more relevant” topics to our society. So why is teaching literature so important? Why do we “have to” learn about literature in school? And is it as important today as it was years ago? These are the questions being asked of litterateurs, as though they were on trial. They are defending literature studies, as many experts in the liberal arts fields are defending their own fields. There are many who argue that apart from the necessary learning which school enforces, the knowledge that we gain from studying literature is not used in the real world. So, they say, it should be eliminated as a necessity for all students.

Of course, those of us who have been moved by the forces of literature, whether as a teacher or a student, would testify on its behalf. Studying literature gives us a foothold in the arts that is essential to balance our interests in the sciences. To integrate both sides of our brains we need the studies in both academic worlds. Literature allows us to learn how to express ourselves in situations we may have never expected to be in. Literature allows us to escape this world, and unconsciously teaches us empathy, among other teachings of humanities. And as we face more troubling times, with more tribulations on the horizon, it seems that recognition of literature as

essential and constitutive to the world in these hard times is necessary. As we face our own personal troubling times, the teaching and learning of literature should rise to this occasion, and offer something more substantial than social media, popular culture, TV, and video games. In “Teaching Literature in Dark Times,” Elaine Showalter projects these questions. She asks if we should use times of crisis to open our hearts and our minds to literature, and use literature to spark moral conversations. As the aesthetic value of literature seems to be fading, it appears that it may be true: in dark times, literature gets its call to action.

Without a doubt, the appeal of literature as an academic pursuit has lost its luster, and the majority is left questioning the place literature holds as an important cultural learning experience, among other learning endeavors. Statistics of our time tell us that in order to be monetarily successful, you must engage in technological fields. If in college you choose to pursue literature, the common response is a joking “good luck.” It seems that most people who choose to claim literature as their focus in school end up in a teaching profession, which is considered a much less lucrative, and less prestigious field than say, engineering. In the fast-paced world we live in today, what is the significance of this type of learning when it stands against the mighty fields of technology, economics, physics? The defenders of literature may argue that the subject is as important as history in many ways. They may say that literature teaches lessons important to society as a whole: lessons in tolerance, in communication, in mistakes of the past, all in the hope that we may build a better future. There is something about reading the words on the pages, internalizing them, and applying them—consciously or not—to our own lives that sets literature study apart from the rest. In this sense, literature does offer something that other topics cannot in relationships with the wider world. We contextualize our lives every day by a series of systematic metaphors. Our way of thinking has been heavily influenced by our studies in

literature, and the elimination of such an academic field would create a dissonance that could not be remedied with technological studies standing alone. “Just as the basic experiences of human spatial orientations give rise to orientational metaphors, so our experiences with physical objects (especially our own bodies) provide the basis for an extraordinarily wide variety of ontological metaphors, that is, ways of viewing events, activities, emotions, ideas, etc., as entities and substances...Ontological metaphors like this are necessary for even attempting to deal rationally with our experiences,” (Lakoff and Johnson, 25-26).

Unquestionably, we cannot be isolated from the world—at least not completely. We cannot roll out the “do not enter” tape and section ourselves away from the situations world presents us with. We will experience tragedy in some way, at some point in our own lives. We will face it individually, as a community, as a society, as a planet. Showalter states that she raises questions of literature value, in dark times especially, “to remind us that our role and our subject are not cleanly detached from the world, but messily entangled with it,” (Showalter, 140). This is undoubtedly true, considering we cannot isolate certain parts of ourselves to “fit” into certain areas of our lives and the circumstances that match.

It is probable that not one teacher, of any level or subject, could truthfully say that they have not been affected by some sort of troubling incident, and that that inner turmoil did not show up in the classroom in some way or form. We cannot ignore tragedy, we can only figure out how to cope. As readers, we practice empathy by allowing ourselves to walk in the shoes of the characters. We tend to place ourselves into the situations that the characters are in, facing the same dilemmas. A common response to reading is to think about what we would do, or how we might react, if those circumstances were our own. It is part of our role as teachers to help students identify these instances as a coping method in tragic times. Students call up their

memories of these circumstances that they have encountered in books, in order to call up the proper emotions that help them understand situations of crisis. In the teaching of literature, crisis provides us with unforeseen opportunities to help students cope, and to see and feel the power of communication in literary influences in times of struggle.

Crisis teaching is “getting the students to use their own knowledge and skills actively to come to terms with the situation,” (Showalter, 138). This is how literature can teach how to be human. This is how literature evokes discussions of morality and deep reflections on human intentions and on reality. This is how we shape our own lives, our own morals, our own decisions, and how we learn to accept circumstance. In the case of troubling circumstances, literature and discussions on literature lead students to a certain type of processing. Literature provides what other academic subjects cannot in that it provides consolation, and learning how to face these inevitable situations and come out alive on the other side. As a small-scale example, *Marley and Me* gave many readers, myself included, words to focus on for dog lovers who had to say goodbye to a beloved family pet. On a broader spectrum, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* may have given readers the consolation they needed after the tragic 9/11. Readers need to be able to depend on literature for a variety of reasons. There are countless stories told through literature, each with varying interpretations attached which can reach any person who is open to it. Teaching about these stories, directing our students to the ones that may reach them during a crisis perhaps, provides students with the emotional tools they may need to deal with the inner turmoil—it gives them words by which to rationalize the events affecting their lives.

Our job is indeed more complicated when it comes to our students, individually and collectively, facing grief, pain, and struggle. We as teachers may feel a sigh of relief in our classrooms, as we face our own demons wreaking havoc on our own lives. We may have seen

how literature has taught us to cope. But when it comes to the crises in the lives of our students, when we see them caught up in tragedy, this is how we can test the validity of our faith in literature as a guide, particularly in troubling times. When we see a student, plagued with the weight of a divorce in the family, or a parent in jail, or the loss of a loved one, we, as teachers, are responsible for helping them in all the ways we can. As experts in literature, we are charged with the task of finding a piece that may allow them this escape, or the foresight to ease the pain in some way. This is where the importance of literature is fully realized. Other fields of study cannot match the potential healing powers that come with the vast world that is exposed through the eyes of a character in a novel.

In these cases of teaching, our own influences may unconsciously slip into our lessons on literature. Our own perceptions of reality, along with our own moral and ethical codes come out in our classrooms. We cannot avoid this. The ethical code of teachers may come into question here. How can we have these discussions on the real world, unbalanced by tragic circumstances, and how literature may help to reflect on this, *without* alluding to some personal philosophy? In a lot of ways, these personal philosophies have been shaped by the literature we have been exposed to. We influence student reaction in everything we do. It is very difficult to stay completely and totally objective in teaching, and therefore, it is difficult to teach students to be completely and totally objective when they know as well as we do that personal experience contributes directly to our perceptions and how we deal with hardship. The students, in learning from literature, can learn that anything could have a different appearance when looking from different angles. They can learn to see through another's eyes, whether it be the teacher's or a peer in the classroom. Helen Vendler, in "What We Have Loved, Others Will Love," asserts that, "It is certainly more instructive to our students to find teachers coming at literature from many

vantage points than to be subjected to a single vision; and the most useful critical truth a student can learn is that a piece of literature yields different insights depending on the questions put to it,” (36). In troubling times, a multitude of views in light of literature can provide students with options for processing and managing. Presenting students with texts which have differing views within them, either by author or by character, allows students to easily identify with differing perspectives. It is important that a teacher can see the power behind this, and implement it in the classroom. We, as teachers, cannot pretend that the views of others have not played a role in shaping our reality, or that our own views do not play a role in our outward expressions and actions.

Tragedy has a unique effect on us as human beings in that it can affect our everyday lives in a variety of ways. We cannot go on teaching as if nothing has happened when we are plagued by something. Students cannot go on learning as if nothing has happened in the same way. We cannot expect our students to have moved on in a short period of time, with no coping outlet, in the same way that we do not expect that from ourselves. We do not do them justice by carrying on in the same manner, when we know how much tragedy may play a role on literature, and conversely, how literature may play a role on tragedy. Many authors have composed their most beautiful and recognized work in the face of tragedy, just as many readers have made it through personal tragedies with literature by their sides. “Literature both seems irrelevant in tragedy and crucial in its power to console and illuminate,” (Showalter, 133). Without the lessons in literature that our souls desperately crave, we, as human beings, may lack these tools to make it through our own misfortunes and heartbreaks, as well as worldly tragedies.

Even if not completely obvious, literature affects us in our awareness and how we engage in dealing with struggle. Our own influences play a crucial role in how we perceive the world.

We should be allowing students to explore how a powerful influence, such as societal tragedy, may change the shape of their own perceptions. It is unethical to not allow them that. Turning to popular culture and TV for answers in tough times will not lead to coping satisfaction. It will not teach the way literature does. It would not offer the same strength that literature can. While music as a form of poetry, or an emotionally stimulating TV show may provide some guidance to our young students in particular, they do not fully integrate or engulf the students into a new world, where they may be inclined to imagine themselves facing differing circumstances to a larger degree. These other outlets for grief may provide a Band-Aid for their emotional wounds, but literature can provide the healing and protective elements which allow anyone to be better prepared for the future hard times that will inevitably come. Literature and literary environments, provide an outlet for communication in all situations. Literature steps up to provide essential lessons on how to deal with the world. It gives examples of the past and promotes healthy communication. It teaches people the importance of kindness and gives strength through solidarity. Without being explicitly taught about literature in this way, it is likely that many may overlook its importance. Many people view these classes and this topic of study as just reading stories, when the stories themselves offer them so much more, unconsciously shaping their mindsets.

Furthermore, literature offers lessons in individual coping by way of interpretation—we all may interpret what we read differently, so the lessons we learn from literature are individually tailored. Although various literary critics may have put forth widely accepted analyses of literary works that are commonly seen in the classroom, the critics' views can be completely undone by a different perspective as seen through the eyes of a student reading the text for the first time. Or the second. Or the third. These different interpretations are subject to an individual's knowledge,

skills, and experience. Gerald Graff highlights this notion in “Disliking Books at an Early Age,” in stating that: “As readers we are necessarily concerned with *both* the questions posed by the text and the questions we bring to it from our own differing interests and cultural backgrounds,” (46-47). Individuals are able to use these different interpretations in application to their own lives, and to their understanding of the outside world in relation to themselves. Literature plays the role of connection in this sense. It is the bind between an individual’s inner thoughts and outside situations affecting the individual on different levels. Interpretations by an individual, expressed in a group environment, then discussed, and influenced by interpretations of others provides individuals with a variety of values and outlooks, as seen through literature, that may be applied to current and future real-life situations. This allows them to process and synthesize the troubling times that will undeniably affect them, in ways that are unmatched by subjects currently viewed as more important, or more applicable to the real world. Despite what critics to this topic of study may argue, literature is needed by everyone, especially when exposed to the tragedies that are rampant in our world.

It is the belief of many people inspired and influenced by literary works that literature provides so much more than any other academic subject, social trend, or technological advancement. Literature offers life lessons you cannot receive anywhere else. It offers an outlet for your own thoughts and a place for internalizing perceptions of others. It offers ideals in individualism and solidarity. “We do have it within our power, I believe, to reform ourselves, to make it our own first task to give, especially to our beginning students, that rich web of associations, lodged in the tales of majority and minority culture alike, by which they could begin to understand themselves as individuals and as social beings,” (Vendler, 40). Literature ignites our imaginations and helps us to cope in troubling times. It allows us the freedom to

process great tragedy in our own lives, and stimulates communication. It gives us our voices when we are unable to conceive the words to describe our struggles, and shapes our experiences in preparation for the hardships to come. Shaping our understandings in troubling times is in direct correlation with the learning and interpreting of literature. In this way, literature provides what many others cannot, and therefore should hold its place in importance in the academic world.

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Project 3 Final (Pedagogy)

Writing Through Reading and Hands-On Activities

As teachers, we do anything we can to deliver lessons in a memorable way, get students to pay attention, and keep their focus. We want our students to succeed, and we will do anything we can to make this happen. This includes dancing around the room to get their focus off cellphones and onto the writing lesson. Teaching writing comes with a unique set of challenges, including student apathy. We want the students to care enough to put their best effort into their expositions, because then we can help them to grow as writers, and improve their articulation skills—something we know to be important in almost all employment realms. Providing students with hands-on activities helps them to engage in the writing process, and puts emphasis on the process itself, rather than on the final product. Students need a variety of activities to engage in, in order to provide opportunities for all types of learners in the classroom to feel as though they are “getting it.” Learning to write through reading is also a valuable lesson in the Language Arts classroom. Often, through engaging activities and reading, teachers can send multiple messages to students, as opposed to focusing on, or appearing to focus on, one simple concept. “Students are different from one another, and they bring to the experience of writing a wide range of resources and strengths. At the same time, any writer can be positioned as weak, struggling, or incompetent. All writers need to learn multiple strategies and modalities to compensate for moments when they feel stuck or defeated, to get on with the business of composing,” (NCTE, “Professional Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing”). The construction of my own lessons in class are centered around this idea, aligning with the given curriculum.

The first quarter in the first semester of my 7th grade Language Arts class focuses predominantly on informative writing. That is, writing that is intended to inform the reader on a

certain topic, based on given evidentiary sources. This is considered to be “Unit 1.” We incorporate lessons that focus on tone, central idea, purpose, theme, point of view, and audience, to get students to come to working understandings of such concepts. Students should be able to write an effective informative essay, based on given pieces of evidence, and should also be able to give a multimedia presentation. Of course, this is a lot to cover in one quarter! Especially when combined with all the state standards and all the hullabaloo that inevitably comes up—fire drills, half days, etc. So, the best strategies are those that combine learning standards in effective ways. In my classroom, we strive to understand these concepts through hands-on activities, and working with peers. In the following sections, I will break up the quarter by weeks, explaining and giving examples of how I would aim to teach informative writing. These choices have been informed by a combination of experience and research, as I believe all decisions in the classroom ought to be.

Week One

- ✓ Introduce key terms.
- ✓ See terms in applications to texts; practice with peers, practice individually.
- ✓ Review/read and discuss examples of informative writing—from previous students and from well-known authors, to examine rhetorical choices that made writing effective.
- ✓ Generating ideas.

Getting Started—The Pre-work

Introductions are very important, as I think we all know. Sometimes, your first impression can be a lasting one. So, you need to make sure you start off on the right foot. Often, students have the most trouble with their introduction paragraphs in any form of writing, because it is difficult to just get started. For this reason, getting started with getting started needs to be first on the list. Students need to learn how to generate ideas through writing and reading initially. Before diving into writing introductions, introducing some key terms in this unit is a

must. Concepts like claim, thesis, purpose, point of view, and audience need to be defined so that students can understand them in terms of their own writing.

While sitting in working groups, students will work individually first, to come up with definitions and examples of these terms, most likely as a homework assignment. The examples must be from works of literature. This means that they will have to search for them either in the library (in children's books probably) and on the internet. Of course, we will do a short refresher on ethics and the how to's of internet research, but this shouldn't take long as it should be just a refresher on something they already know. On the day this is due, students will bring their work to the group and decide the best examples they have seen. Based on these, the groups will work together to come up with a working definition for each concept, to refer to throughout the year. Then, they will practice identifying these concepts in literature with their groups, using their definitions and examples. As groups, they will be given examples of texts—ranging from easy to difficult in comprehension level—and they will have to decide what the purpose was and so on. This will be considered a formative assessment by observational check. From this point, we will examine whole essays, in the “informative” genre, and discuss as a class the concepts that are working in the piece, which they have studied. This will get students thinking in this style of writing, so that we may continue to work with it for the entire quarter.

For all the students who just “don't know what to write,” and decide to sit and do nothing for hours at a time, we also work with some getting started activities specifically. Now, with this style of writing, it is difficult to “not know what to write” because it is evidence based writing—meaning that students will read 2-4 evidence texts, ending with a writing prompt based on those readings. So, they are writing an essay in response to what they have read (it seems like that combines the reading to write exercises for me). This is where we practice planning. I like to

show students various examples of writing plans so that they can choose the one that works best for them. This gives them the power of choice, and most students tend to feel a little more at ease knowing their writing approach is largely in their own hands. When explaining the plans, I go into more detail with the plan I have had the most success with, and that is one that gets students writing early on. I work with them to practice jotting notes down as they are reading the source (annotation), and highlighting information they find particularly important. This means that they also need to identify their audience early on, as part of the annotation process. Before we start working on our writing in more depth, we have to establish how to get started, and the best way to do that is to just start writing—what they think about the sources, what questions would they ask, and so on.

Week Two

- ✓ Effective writing strategies—descriptive writing.
- ✓ Effective writing strategies—punctuation.
- ✓ Effective writing strategies—fragments.
- ✓ Reading from novels in literature circles; class discussions on rhetorical choices and their effects—group responses.

Bending the Rules

When students are told that they are allowed to bend grammar rules, they are all too eager to get started. I like to frame as many lessons as I can with this notion. Students love to hear that it is okay to not have “perfect” grammar when it comes to almost any style of writing. Many authors deliberately choose to bend the grammar rules that our students are taught are sacred and set in stone. When any writer wishes to elicit a response from their readers by using text style, more effective writing is produced. I want my students to make deliberate decisions about their writing, in order to produce the effects they wish to produce. I want them to think about what the reader is expecting and how they want to respond to those expectations. So, we talk a lot about

audience when we go into these strategies in the classroom. The three effective writing strategies I like to focus on, which take up most of the hands-on type activities in the class, are imagery, punctuation, and fragments. The use of these three rhetorical strategies generate plenty of misconceptions for students. We “train” them to avoid too much description in certain types of writing, to never make a punctuation “error,” and to avoid fragments at all costs. On the other hand, students are also consistently exposed to material which uses these strategies in effective ways. They have asked teachers in the past why they cannot do this, and now they get to hear that they can.

Of course, when I first tell them this, they go a little crazy throwing dashes and colons into every sentence in seemingly random fashion. This is to be expected. But, I tell them I like that they are trying, because that is how you learn—by experimenting. In order to aid in their practice, we read examples of effective writing that breaks the traditional rules of grammar. Students can see how others use deliberate rhetorical strategies to produce a certain effect for the reader. Then, we get into more serious practice. Three lessons I use for these three strategies are: “Describe a Setting,” “Listen for the Punctuation,” and “Fragments Change Meanings.”

“Describe a Setting” is a group activity. Each group gets art materials, a piece of white construction paper, and a piece of lined paper for each group member. I show some pictures of various settings, and tell the students that they can choose any setting they want for a written description. The students are then given about 15-20 minutes to write 2-3 paragraphs describing the setting they chose. They are to use as much imagery as they possibly can. I tell them that I should be able to perfectly visualize their setting. Once the time is up, I have them rotate these descriptions clockwise. Then, the student to their left has to draw the setting that has just been handed to them. They must draw the setting *exactly* as it is written. If there was no color

described in the writing, then no color is added to the picture. Students get a kick out of this, and get a much better idea of how imagery works in the mind of the reader. Of course, they may not necessarily exaggerate imagery descriptions in their writing, but they will know what they have to say to project a clear picture in the reader's mind.

"Listen for the Punctuation" requires me to discuss conventional rules for punctuation marks that elicit a pause from readers: colons, semicolons, dashes, commas, and periods (or question marks and exclamation marks). We discuss the pausing associated with each mark—how long you would typically pause for each mark and the implications for the reader. Then, I give out a handout that has a paragraph on it. This paragraph is a little difficult for the students on comprehension, but that is so they focus on the punctuation part of the activity. This paragraph has no punctuation marks in it. The students listen and follow along as I read the paragraph aloud, pausing where the original punctuation marks are. I read through the paragraph twice. Then, I give them a copy of the original punctuation and they see how well they did just based on listening to my pausing. The students then write a short response as a group which details the purpose of different kinds of pausing punctuation. They get the idea that they have power as an author to stop and pause the reader when they want to. They are able to use this strategy to put meaning into their writing where they want to put meaning, through punctuation emphasis.

"Fragments Change Meanings" is especially interesting for students because they have been trained to avoid fragments. They are hesitant to try these because of previous training and the dreaded "red pen mentality." Once I show them examples of fragments in common works, and what it would look like to make the sentences "grammatically correct," they are a little more open to experimentation. For this activity, I give students a copy of a short story or a poem, and I

have them create some fragments to add emphasis in certain places. Then, they present what they have done to their groups, and decide on the best way to add emphasis through fragments.

Following this, they work together as a group to provide a short response to the question of how fragments can change meanings. Once I point out that authors use fragments all the time, it's a shattered glass realization for them in that they have been told they are not allowed to do something that authors have been publishing for years.

After working through these activities, we begin reading a class novel. The purpose of focusing on a novel is to see how authors make deliberate rhetorical decisions and to openly discuss the effects of these. This gets students into a critical mindset, while also providing a continuous example for them for their own writing. Reading together helps them with comprehension skills, writing skills, and critical thinking skills. Placing students in “literature circles” is a technique used to allow students to collaborate with each other for a rhetorical purpose. Students, in their groups, are responsible for producing responses to assigned readings from this novel, highlighting the elements that we have focused on in the classroom for that week. Each student must contribute to the groups literature circle notebook, and the majority of the reading is expected to be done on the students’ own time. During class, when the groups meet, they must discuss what they have read and how the work uses certain rhetorical strategies and to what effect these strategies are used.

Week Three

- ✓ Introductions—reading them and writing them.
- ✓ Reading from novel in literature circles; class discussions on rhetorical choices and their effects—group responses.

Introduce Yourself

As I stated before, how you start off in writing is important. You want to make a lasting impression on the reader. You want the reader to want to keep reading. This puts a lot of pressure on students, and can make them feel a little self-conscious. So, I think that it is important to get them warmed up a bit. They should be familiar with getting started, based on earlier lessons on that topic, but the actual process of writing the introduction paragraph will need some work.

One aspect of the introduction that students need to relearn is what they perceive is an appropriate “hook” sentence. They are trained at an early age that an effective beginning sentence is either a question or exclamation which reiterates the prompt in some way. Although this is not a “wrong” way to start per se, it does seem a bit elementary, which does not give the appearance of the higher level thinking that students should be aiming for at this age. Because of this, I try to push students to avoid starting this way. They need to force themselves to attempt different techniques. We examine various ways to start formal essays and other styles of writing, pulled from high scoring papers in previous years or from excerpts by published authors specifically showing these effective writing techniques. We also look at effective questioning to begin works, rather than just restating the prompt in the form of a question. We then review the other components within an introduction paragraph, including background information necessary for the reader, and a complete claim or thesis statement.

Once they feel like they have a solid understanding of how to begin, and a good idea of the contents of an introduction, they practice. They are all given sources to read and a prompt. Individually, they write their introduction paragraphs. Then, they compare with their group-mates. As a group, they write the strongest introduction they can come up with based on their individual work. The class goes into competition mode from this point, with a guest judge—the

Assistant Principal. They love this part because they love to compete, and they love to show off for someone else. The winning group will get candy from this competition.

This week, and in the weeks to come, we continue to examine our readings from our class novel, how the rhetorical choices fit in with our lessons for the week, and project how they will inform us in further lessons. To ensure that students continue to use the reading, students should continue to work in literature circles. This creates, as William Broz discusses in his article, “Not Reading: The 800-Pound Mockingbird in the Classroom,” a group dependency. Students depend on each other to get to know the material, and their own work with the literature determines how they will proceed and succeed in the class.

Week Four

- ✓ Body paragraphs—reading them and writing them.
- ✓ Reading from novel in literature circles; class discussions on rhetorical choices and their effects—group responses.

What’s in the Middle

The body paragraphs are just as important as any other part of the essay, but in different ways. The body is meant to propel the reader forward, to keep the interest level and continue to disclose only the information that the author intends to disclose. This is really where the rhetorical strategies the students have been practicing get to shine. So, we work on recalling those activities and what we learned from them. We discuss how they may fit into work with middle paragraphs—the meat of the essay sandwich. We read over effective work, just as we did with the introductions. Then we practice. Students return to their work with their introductions, and draft body paragraphs for the same essay.

With evidence-based writing, the style of writing we focus on in this first quarter, students must recall evidence from their given sources in defense of what they state in their

introduction paragraphs as their thesis. So, we must work on how to include that evidence without interrupting the flow of the work. Of course, we examine how this is done in high scoring papers and in famous works, and we practice individually and in groups. But, in order to ensure that they are getting the hang of backing up their statements in elaboration, I consistently ask students to explain themselves when talking about anything in the classroom. I ask for examples; I ask them why a detail helps their story. For example, if a student wants to tell me a personal example of something we are discussing in class, I ask them how that is relevant. If they suggest an answer to a question, of any kind, I ask for an example. And I am always sure to mention that these are the justifications that are useful in their work. The elaboration sections of the body paragraphs allow students to practice with imagery details. Here, students should make sure that they can clearly explain to the reader why or how their reasoning is sound, and clarify for the reader exactly how the evidence they have chosen to include is relevant according to the writing prompt.

We continue to read from our class novel this week, allowing the students to focus on imagery and other rhetorical descriptive strategies. This keeps the style of powerful writing fresh in their minds, as they continue to craft their own writing.

Week Five

- ✓ Conclusions—reading them and writing them.
- ✓ Reading from novel in literature circles; class discussions on rhetorical choices and their effects—group responses.

Saying Goodbye Without Saying Goodbye

A bad ending is like a bad aftertaste—even if you loved what came before, the after effect makes the whole experience just not worth it. This is how I explain the importance of conclusions to my students. Then, of course, they break out into a large discussion on what foods

have the worst aftertaste and it takes a minute to get back on track, but I let it happen because it's clear that they will always associate a poor conclusion with something they dislike, like broccoli.

This is where we work on saying goodbye to the reader. I ask them what they want the reader to remember, and how they are going to make them remember. I like to approach this conclusion paragraph in the same way I approach the introduction: reading examples (both good and bad), practicing individually, comparing with the group, and rewriting as a group. I bring the Assistant Principal in again to guest judge the best conclusions and give candy to the winners. This is a good way to remind the class that the conclusion should reiterate themes that have been presented throughout the essay and tie it all together.

A common misconception students have about this paragraph that should be addressed here is that students need to directly address the reader in the final paragraph. Usually, students have the urge to end formal essays like this one with "Now I have told you my reasons. I hope you agree." Again, this is an elementary technique that these students should fight the urge to include. This is an area of direct instruction, where individual issues can be addressed within student groups.

Of course, this week we continue with our class novel, approaching the falling action in the plot. Students should be able to identify, in their literature circle groups, how the author is wrapping up the events in the novel.

Week Six

- ✓ Drafting whole essays.
- ✓ Reading from novel in literature circles; class discussions on rhetorical choices and their effects—group responses.

Putting it All Together

This is the students' chance to put everything they have worked on together into one cohesive piece. They are given new sources and a new prompt, and they work on their own to draft a full essay. They do have access to any notes or resources from the past weeks in order to draft this, and are given plenty of time to feel comfortable with their work. They are also able to ask me questions throughout their drafting process. Allowing students all these resources takes the pressure off students, and allows them comfort in exploring a new writing style that they can personalize. In my experience, when students are comfortable, confident, and calm, they perform much better. And this means that I need to do anything I can to help them reach those feelings.

It is important that students understand these are all steps in a process, and the focus is on finding the writing process that produces the most effective writing for them. It is personalized. So, in breaking down each step, we are looking at different approaches to the writing process. Chris Anson notes that traditional, product-focused instruction was not effective. Process-focused instruction, on the other hand, is effective. When focused on the final product, instruction produces students who end up only writing one way, which means they will excel in one genre, but flounder in others. “‘Skill’ and prior experience seemed to fail us as we struggled to find the right words, organize our ideas, and produce something that other readers would find interesting, amusing, or informative,” (Anson, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, 214). The “rules” for writing papers in the past was dependent upon the final product. This produces students who struggle with producing and revising effective works across genres. Process-based instruction carries the idea that “to develop stronger writers we should intervene in and support the activity of writing itself...” (Anson, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, 223).

Weeks Seven & Eight

- ✓ Peer editing—giving valuable feedback.
- ✓ Revision.
- ✓ Reading from novel in literature circles; class discussions on rhetorical choices and their effects—group responses.

You Did It, Now Fix It

Revision is a process that needs to be practiced just as much as writing. This process of editing and proofreading helps to develop abilities as a writer, and that is what I want my students to work on. Peer editing is not just about checking for grammatical errors; it's about looking for meaning. I want them to be able to identify intentional rhetorical decisions and comment on the strong ones, while giving constructive criticism to those that could use some work to become more effective.

In order to accomplish this, students need to work through this preconception. They need a new definition of what revising is and what it looks like. So, we work to find our working definition. They come together in groups to write one, and then we discuss these as a class. Once we feel like we have a good definition to refer back to, we look at some work to revise. I give students practice essays to revise—I randomly select essays from the previous year and hand them out randomly. I also hand out and review a checklist of what to look for when revising. This is a list we come up with together as a class based on the writing rubric given by the state. Based on this, and the working definition, students individually revise their practice essays. Then, they switch papers with a partner, and the partner revises. After this is complete, the two students compare their revision notes, and discuss and justify their revision decisions. This allows them to get a better idea of what the process feels like.

Once they are comfortable with the process, and understand that revision is not just proofreading, we move on to revision of their own work. They trade their own written work with

a partner, and revise. When they trade back, they are able to discuss the revisions with the reviser, make changes, and rewrite. It is important to explain to students here that this is an ongoing process, and most work should get several revisions.

Week Nine

- ✓ Assessment.
- ✓ Finish novel.

Testing What They Know

Along with completing the novel and engaging in final discussions regarding this, the end of the unit is for a more formal assessment. By this time, students should be ready to engage in a final assessment and should be fully prepared. Students will get a new set of sources along with a new prompt, and will be expected to use all the strategies and recall the lessons and activities we have done in this final essay. Within this assessment, there will also be some questions on the novel, in the form of state assessment questions. This gives the students an additional opportunity to practice for the end-of-year reading state test.

The whole assessment should demonstrate that students have used the combination of hands-on activities and reading to get a better grasp on the writing process. “Any work with texts—reading, writing, and interpretation—is context-dependent, with significance in the world beyond the university,” (Farris, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, 169-170). When working in Language Arts classes, even at a younger age, it is important to show the students how reading and writing are intertwined, and how understanding both helps to build an understanding of greater cultural values. Increasing comprehension and articulation skills allows students to gain tools to succeed in all subjects and future endeavors. It is important to teach students to be “active, critical subjects, aware of how language and visual representations invite them to occupy

various and sometimes conflicting positions as readers and writers,” (Farris, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, 171).

Challenges to the Process

Most teachers will say that one of the biggest challenges to the teaching career in general is a lack of time. In a perfect world, teachers would be able to spend more time on researching and planning effective lessons, which are very likely to change every year. Unfortunately, many teachers simply do not have the time to research, plan, implement, score papers (especially Language Arts teachers), and keep up with the day-to-day responsibilities that happen to come up—meetings of all kinds, primarily. So, unfortunately, the students would be the ones to suffer from this, and that will always be one of the most difficult challenges to overcome in any pedagogy.

Another challenge we face as teachers is resources. The resources that helped me to plan this unit, in particular, came from a Master’s program in English. Not all teachers are lucky enough to put themselves through such a program, and so, have a harder time finding these valuable resources. Of course, there are many provided to us by our school, and more are becoming available through technology sharing. But, we all must be able to sift through what we have, to find something of worth, directly related to the paths we have set out for ourselves in the classroom, and in all likelihood, we also have to change aspects of the resources in order to fit into our personalized classroom strategies. Again, this goes back into the time issue. It is very difficult to continuously make sure lessons are up-to-date with the best resources consulted. Add to this the monetary resource struggle. When it comes to budget, teachers are on the lower salary end. Most of us are not allotted the budget to keep up with the times in terms of education expectations.

The last big challenge we face as teachers is pressure from statewide testing expectations. We want our students to feel free to explore their own styles in reading and writing, and really have an opportunity to excel in their own personal strengths. However, statewide testing expectations seem to force our students into cookie-cutter forms which only allow practice in one type of reading and writing, predominantly. Teachers are responsible to cover such a large number of standards, that there is usually little to no room for creative expression in lessons given. As teachers, we have to use some of our creative thinking to fit in the lessons we know to be important, but somehow don't fit into the given curriculum which bows down to statewide tests. "To restrict students' engagement with writing to only academic contexts and forms is to risk narrowing what we as a nation can remember, understand, and create. As the world grows smaller, we will live by words as never before, and it will take many words framed in many ways to transform that closeness into the mutuality needed to pursue peace and prosperity for our generation and those to come," (CCCC, "Position Statement on the Multiple Uses of Writing").

Despite the many challenges in education, teachers should work to create lessons which do inspire students to express themselves in the best way they can. I do my best to take the pressure off students, by making sure they feel personally prepared for the end-of-year test, and by reminding them that the scores on this one test do not define their full abilities as students. In my experience, students who feel comfortable in the classroom, perform the highest and learn the most overall. Although there are a lot of challenges we face in this profession, teachers should strive to work on their class techniques each year, to continue improving.

Experimenting with Alternative Assignments

It is important to continue to learn as a teacher. Education changes as time goes on, and there is always a new way to approach teaching. By educating yourself on these new techniques,

you can try new activities in the classroom or work on improving the ones you have found to be successful. One advantage to the technology boom is that teachers have more access to resources that allow them to experiment with new ways to approach teaching. This, of course, relies on the idea that curriculum and standardized testing will change along with the time, which does not always happen. So, we as teachers, need to pay special attention to the trends and balance innovative experimental strategies with traditional approaches to give the students a balance that offers the greatest chance of success from all perspectives.

Each genre and style of writing can be approached in different ways. For example, Stacy M. Kitsis explores how social networking can be used in the classroom. Online communication in itself has become a new literary genre to explore in the Language Arts classroom. But, we can adapt lessons to incorporate practice with process, and audience with the online medium. This is something that is especially relevant today. Kitsis makes the argument here that students “need to care about their homework,” and coming to meet them on something they consider themselves experts in, gives them confidence and allows teachers to give feedback that has a better chance of reaching and affecting students. Working through this new strategy, she saw that students put more effort into their homework, and grew because of it. This is something I am looking forward to trying in my own classroom, as just one new approach in teaching writing process.

Another example of testing new approaches in the classroom is Ernest Morrell and Jeffrey M. R. Duncan-Andrade’s take on using “hip hop culture” to improve literacy. Using hip hop in the classroom not only interests students more, as they are familiar with the contemporary material, but it also helps to retain their focus through teaching different styles of writing and literature comprehension. “Teaching Hip-hop as a music and culture of resistance can facilitate the development of critical consciousness in urban youth,” (Morrell and Duncan-Andrade, 89).

The work helps to reach students in many ways. They learn about culture that can be related in other topics, and in other classes. They learn new ways to approach their own experience with literature and composition. Of course, the authors here examine a case which is more relevant demographically, but I think the lesson is that teachers can use unexpected resources like music to help accomplish their goals in the classroom.

Exploring new approaches to teaching writing is good for teachers and for students. Once you have defined your goals for the year, each approach or strategy you work on in the classroom can be adapted to fall under that goal. The bottom line is that we need our students to want to learn, and we need to do our best to ensure we are providing lessons which give the greatest possible chance at success for our students. Continuing to expose students to different interactions with texts from varying genres, and giving them the freedom to experiment with their own writing style through hands-on activities, puts students' education into their own hands. As teachers, we should be shaping how they approach their education, and we should be giving them the tools they will need to pursue learning in the future.

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Project 4 Final (Research)

Obsessed with Gender: Gender Roles and Insanity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's Lady Audley's Secret

Mental Illness and Performative Gender Roles

Mental illness has plagued the human race since the beginning of time. There are numerous ailments which fall under the category, including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, personality disorder, and obsessive compulsive disorder. As time goes on and technology advances, the medical and psychological fields discover more about each one; they even identify new ones. In fact, as time goes on, more cases of mental illness have come to light than in the past, increasing in number of people affected at a younger age. Now that more is being discovered about mental illness, treatments are more common. Not too long ago, a person afflicted with a mental illness was more than likely considered insane or mad, with little to no medical explanation or remedies available. These ailments were associated with darkness, particularly by the greater religions of the time. In the late 18th century, during the Gothic revival period, people became intrigued by this phenomenon of insanity. This was especially reflected in the arts of this time period, literature in particular. The greater belief was that women were at greater risk, due to their “hysterical,” and highly emotional nature. This belief became prescribed upon women of this time, the stereotype was branded on them, and still exists today. However, there have been many to challenge this performative gender role stereotype.

Cultural, economic and intellectual constructions dictate the way madness comes to be known and experienced in any society. This means, that as society changes through time, so do perceptions of madness and its effects as an illness. The people of society control their experience with insanity and mental illnesses. As the obsession with darkness and all things

horrid flourished in the Gothic period of the 18th century, more was to be learned about mental illness because more people were becoming interested through literature. *Frankenstein*, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Monk*, and *Northanger Abbey* are all examples of texts that people of this time period became exposed to, and as consequence, began seeking out more literature of the same genre with rising interest. Of course, a common belief at this time, and perhaps even now, was that mental illness runs rampant through women in particular. It was more common for a woman to be deemed medically insane, because of their “biology.” Despite this, many female authors challenged this concept, and began to approach the idea that women were more prone to such ailments with satirical material in their published works. The assertion that mental illness and gender were closely related was questioned in literature such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Gender roles, as seen clearly in performative speech acts, were being tested at this time.

Performative utterances, or speech acts, is an idea developed by J. L. Austin which holds that there are utterances that “do.” They declare action, and therefore, they incite that action. They, in themselves, perform an action, rather than just describe. These performative statements do not just state something, they *do* something. Intentionality determines whether or not a statement is performative. You may speak with the intention of eliciting action. In the case of gender and gender roles, performative utterances have the ability to lay down the law, so to speak, of what gender is; they prescribe societal rules for action, creating the cycle of gender expectation and resulting cultural action. Throughout Judith Butler’s work with gender as performative action, she validates what performative means, placing it in context with J. L. Austin’s work. Austin’s discussion on performative utterances alludes to the power of words in certain social structures. Butler’s work backs this up. Performative discourse has the ability to

lay the groundwork for, and outline societal/cultural expectation. This causes people to act in certain ways. When it comes to gender, performative utterances become acts inasmuch as they align with the prescribed rules. Once they go against this, they are acting out new performatives.

Gender is performative. We are what people say we are, we are operated by prescriptive discourse, we are expected to play the role that our gender assigns. And gender is determined by historical inscriptions upon the body. These are ideas all present in Judith Butler's "Gender Trouble." Butler describes how our identities are formed by societal constructions and norms, which are based on what the grand majority determine is "right" or "natural," predominantly based on what history has determined to be so. There are cultural standards and dominant discourses which indicate how people are expected to act, and people perform to those expectations, creating a cycle of performative acts and responses, such as those seen by the characters in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*. "Trouble is inevitable" (Butler, *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2540) when it comes to gender—how it is determined and what that means for those constricted by the expectations that follow.

Butler declares a dualism between the body and the consciousness, otherwise known as a culture/nature dualism. The body is the outward expression of the soul, as the dominating discourse holds. The soul holds the gender that the outward body portrays through sex. But what happens when this is not the case? When the gender doesn't "match" the sex, there is a war cry that the unnatural has occurred, putting the rest of the "natural" society in danger of being polluted. "If the body is synecdochal for the social system per se or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment," (Butler, *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2545). This means that the grand majority of society, and the dominating discourse, hold that the internal should match the

external, when that is hardly the case. We are assigned gender roles and expected to act in a certain way. Butler notes that "...the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription..." (Butler, *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2543).

We act, consciously or subconsciously, in accordance to the societal expectations of our gender label. Sometimes, this also means that our actions are justified by way of gender stereotype. For example, in the case of madness or insanity in the 18th century, if there was no religious reason, or cause, for the medical case, a reason was given based on gender, and actions carried out *due to* gender. Butler asserts that this creates a misguided illusion. "In other words, acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality," (Butler, *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2549). Culture fabricates unity between sex and gender in order to create a system which perpetuates regulated discourse to encourage performative acts based on gender expectations. There may be a distinction between the internal and the external, but as long as there are assigned gender roles and performative speech and action that come along with these labels, the distinction line becomes blurred between sex and gender.

There is a presence of an ongoing circular cycle when it comes to acting to expectations. Action, leads to belief, which leads to further action, and so on. Butler notes that, "Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane societal audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief," (Butler, *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2552). It is almost as if she is stating that if you perform long enough, you will begin to believe the role that you are

playing is truly yourself. This illusion becomes your reality. And perhaps that is how history becomes inscribed on us. “Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in a sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality,” (Butler, *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2548).

Butler says that the disappearance of labels, which only stand to segregate us, will mean the disappearance of gender altogether because the terminology that dominates us will no longer be needed. Although it seems that we are a far cry from the disappearance of gender labels, we are starting to see the regulating discourse shift in many ways regarding the natural and what that means for gender equality. In all honesty, people have been challenging these gender roles for a long time. However, they have been doing so quietly, masked by the cover of literature, so as to discretely impact as many as possible for the better. As in, there are challenges to traditional gender roles present in various novels of older times, but they are presented in a way that could be called literary irony—a rhetorical device used to make the work more effective for what it is, with no larger agenda at play. As time goes on, people are becoming more outgoing in their challenges, and more research is being done to learn about the realities of mental illness, leaving gender out of the equation.

In the latter years of the 18th century, though, gender roles were taken more seriously in expectations for how men and women should act. If you, as either gender, did not perform in the way that society expected you to, it meant that you may not get a spouse—something that seemed to be of almost greatest concern (directly behind food and money), and something that may have branded you as mad or insane in itself. Women had very little power in this time, and

they were treated as such. That is not to say they had no power at all, but men were clearly superior, and women were typically regarded as prone to hysterics, often perceived as mad, and were very seldom taken seriously.

Despite this, women began to challenge these gender roles in the form of literature. Jane Austen, for example, intentionally mocks high society through the sarcastic tone of her narrator and the exaggerated mannerisms and dialogue in characters like Mrs. Allen, in the novel, *Northanger Abbey*. Mary Elizabeth Braddon was another female author that seemed to believe in shifting gender roles, as seen in her novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*. In this Gothic novel, the reader is able to pick up on the subtle defiance of gender expectation, acted out through the various characters and their choices, in regard to their own afflictions and dealings in madness. "Several characters are accused of madness or threatened with commitment to an asylum: Lucy Audley's mother is institutionalized after her daughter's birth due to the onset of what modern medicine would term an extreme form of post-partum depression; Robert Audley is threatened with the asylum if he persists in hunting for evidence of his new aunt's crimes, an accusation that would find a foothold in his eccentric and effeminate behavior; and finally Lady Audley herself confesses that the unwomanly actions such as murder and arson of which she is guilty were brought on by insanity, thereby absolving her of guilt," (Hayes, 7-8). Gender and insanity are both linked with identity formation in this novel, constructing the major theme that gender roles prescribing identity is the real madness.

Michael Audley's Good Intentions

Right from the beginning of this novel, the reader sees gender roles being challenged through the character, Michael Audley. He is a rich, kind gentleman who has lost his wife, making him all the more sensitive. His only daughter, Alicia, is the apple of his eye. When he

meets Lucy Graham, a woman who bewitches everyone with her beauty and good nature, he is instantly overcome with love and wishes to marry her, despite the large age gap.

For a man of his status and nature, it would be uncommon that he had not remarried by then, especially since he did have a daughter, and she would need a proper role model. However, he waits. He meets Lucy and is bewitched by her; she has this effect on anyone she meets. He wants to marry her because she is charming, which might also be uncommon, since most unions were set based on social and monetary status. But then he does something especially out of the ordinary for a man, or the perceived man in this case, when he proposes to Lucy. He says to her, earnestly and repeatedly, “I scarcely think there is a greater sin, Lucy, than that of the woman who marries a man she does not love...nothing but misery can result from a marriage dictated by any motive but truth and love,” (Braddon, 15). Of course, this is noted after the mention of the “dull flame” that was his first marriage. What is surprising about his statement is that in this time, “truth and love” were not common motivating factors for a marriage union. And it was especially unusual for a man to put forth this idea. In this case, Michael Audley’s character challenges male preconceptions according to gender, as well as class. He deliberately puts Lucy’s best interest forward, declaring love openly to a woman of younger age and lower social standing.

Braddon uses this character to portray a gender role shift in males. Although it is subtle, she shows that a male character can choose to disregard social standing, and declare “truth and love” as most the important values in a marriage. Typically, female characters are the ones searching, endlessly, for truth and love, if they are searching for anything at all. Usually, females can be seen in famous works of literature as minor characters—serving in the background of the main plot, and not contributing much to the storyline. Throughout this novel, Michael Audley

consistently puts Lucy's interests before his own. When Lucy says they need to leave immediately to visit her "dying" friend (a story she made up), they go. When Lucy says she feels uncomfortable by the presence of Michael's nephew, Robert, he kicks him out. Although it does seem like his willingness to accommodate her is an exaggerated challenge to the male gender role, Braddon makes her point that women can have power over men in the name of love, challenging a second gender stereotype: that women are powerless.

This may also be saying that Sir Audley suffers from low self-esteem, portraying that he clearly does not trust his own judgment. He even second guesses his proposal to Lucy, questioning her motivations, seemingly paranoid. He seems to express more paranoia as he is consistently checking up on her, and allowing her to have such control over him. This is potentially a case of mental illness, for a minor character in the story.

Lucy uses performative utterances to take advantage of her husband's good intentions. She knows that he will believe anything she says, and that he will bend to her will (although, he may make it seem like it was his idea in the first place). She speaks, on certain occasions, with the intention of provoking action from her husband, intentionally taking advantage of his nature. This manipulative action is a sign for mental illness in another character. Her behavior, although indicative of mental sickness, places power in the hands of a woman that uses mental games to control those around her. In this time, especially, it was uncommon to attribute such power to a woman, so it had to be masked under mental illness for the audience to truly accept this notion. For example, she intended for her nephew by marriage, Robert, to leave their home. Although she did not explicitly say this to her husband, she put the idea in his head to kick Robert out, thereby making her statements performative by way of intentionality. Michael Audley carries out the action through performative utterances as well, with literal statements, such as telling Robert

to leave. Both Lucy and Michael's intentions, as seen through their chosen performative statements in many cases, challenge the typical gender expectations, taking advantage of Sir Audley's good intentions and placing the power in Lady Audley's hands. Both seem to play off each other's weaknesses that are seen through their given mental instabilities.

The Nature of Robert Audley's Obsession

Robert Audley is a character in his late 20s. He is a barrister, by title and social standing, and nephew to Sir Michael Audley. Throughout the novel it is clear that Robert challenges standard male gender expectations. He does not like sports (hunting), for example, and he appears to have little to no interest in women in any romantic way. He does appear to have feelings for George Talboys, however. Mr. Talboys, Robert's friend, disappears as a part of the plot in this story. Robert, spends the majority of the novel investigating this disappearance. Although he does seem to come to a few dead ends, he carries on, seemingly becoming obsessed, under the spoken guise of "determination."

Braddon consistently emasculates Robert, according to the male gender standard of this time. He is portrayed as a bit abnormal, but his character doesn't seem to be punished in any way for his feminine nature. In many ways, the reader may even question his sexuality in terms of his obsession with finding George. His obsession is an indication of mental illness as well. He is relentless in questioning various people on the path to finding George, showing clear signs of fixation, and so, a form of madness.

Robert also consistently blames women for the troubles of the world. He claims that they are "at the bottom of all mischief." He does not trust women, but was willing to put all his time and effort into finding George, and taking care of George's son. His repetitive complaints about women seem to also be an indication that he suffers from obsessive compulsions or tendencies.

His statements about himself are performative in that he declares his determination for finding George early on, with every intention of never giving up. His statements are performative about women in that he continuously states his annoyance with them, and is never distracted by any woman romantically, including his cousin, Alicia, who continues to pursue him. Braddon portrays this male character in this way, to show the irony in asserting that only women are prone to madness.

The fact that Robert is portrayed in a role reversal, as more feminine in nature, opens up dialogue about the theme of madness present in this novel, running parallel to challenges to gender roles. Lucy, toward the end of the novel, suggests that Robert is insane with hysterics, an affliction that is, of course, more likely to affect women as society prescribes. Given Robert's feminine nature, emasculated character, and obsession with George Talboys, it seems a valid theory that he would be affected by this madness. Robert fails to conform to the prescriptive gender roles of this time, placing him in perfect position to be accused of madness. However, Robert's character could also be viewed as intelligent, powerful, and independent—three characteristics women challenging gender roles ached for in recognition. So, it seems that Braddon writes Robert in a feminine light, challenges his character with accusations of madness, and allows him to carry on in his determination to find truth, riding the borderline between obsession and strong will.

George Talboys and His Passions

George Talboys, another male character in his late 20s, is instantly portrayed as a highly passionate man. On his ship ride home from Australia, he tells a fellow passenger how he left home to find support for his family in the form of gold. The passenger, with good intentions, asks George if he has considered the possibility that something had happened to his wife while

he was away. This sends George into a frenzied rant, passionately declaring that this was completely out of the question, and chastising the passenger for even suggesting such a horror. Of course, in hindsight we see that this was foreshadowing the death of Helen Talboys. This passionate frenzy could be considered as the early stages of hysteria, a mental illness which should affect women primarily. Thus, Braddon marks a second male character with a gender role reversal.

Upon arrival back home, and after running into his old friend Robert Audley, George learns of his wife's death. This puts him into an uncontrollable depression. Robert is determined to help George get his mind of this, but up until his disappearance, George seems to be irreparable. Here we see yet another indication that another character suffers from some form of insanity. Depression and anxiety clearly plague George, as seen through his various speech acts and resulting actions, whenever he is present in the scene. He is completely distraught by his wife's death, and seems to be the only male character that challenges the traditional gender expectation of men being calm and collected, without such intense passion—hysteria.

George states many times the love he had for his wife and the pain he feels from her death in his absence. He also cries over this idea, which again challenges the male stereotype of toughness. In a world where the requirements of marriage are that the two like each other "well enough," they don't love anyone else, and they are of appropriate social status; true love and passion are rare, especially from men. Because of these actions, George might also be considered a feminine-like character. His grief and agitated depression may seem to be early signs of mania, and so again, we have another male character seemingly afflicted with a "woman's illness." His performative dialogue sets him up as weak, which is another preconception of the female character, and he is killed off by a woman, thrusting power, yet again, into the hands of women.

Although he may be somewhat “manly” in light of the other male main characters, most of his demeanor can be interpreted as largely feminine in nature, further conveying the idea that gender roles assigned my performative speech acts should be challenged.

The Deception of Lady Audley

Lady Lucy Audley, the most suspicious character in this novel, confirms Robert’s assertion that women are mischievous. She challenges the female stereotype in many ways throughout the novel. Although most of the characters are vocal about what they expect from men and women, in accordance with their assigned gender roles, Lady Audley is one of the most outspoken about how men and women should act. She lays down the complete expectations for men and women, and openly states how she has been scorned by love in her life as Helen Talboys. She challenges the womanly role of a deserted woman, when she leaves her old life by faking her own death, deserting her own child, and going out on her own to start over and look for a better life (and husband). She challenges the womanly role of mother and caretaker, when she leaves her son. “The afflictions, diseases and depravity of women result from the breaking away from the normal natural functions. Following natural determinism, doctors confine the woman within the boundaries of a specific role: she is a mother and guardian of virtue,” (Tasca et al., “Women And Hysteria In The History Of Mental Health”).

Helen Talboys (a.k.a. Lucy Graham, a.k.a. Lady Audley) does not have the typical relationship with her biological son, Georgey. When the reader first meets Georgey, it is obvious that they are not bonded in a way that would be the gender affiliated expectation for a mother and son. For example, when Robert asks Georgey about his mother, he exclaims, “No...not mamma! Mamma was always crying! I didn’t like mamma!” (Braddon 96). Helen Talboys defies the role of a “good” mother in that she does not regard her son with a selfless nature. She

abandons him. She does not live up to the norm in that she lacks maternal instinct. This portrays a cultural concern for women, that they will not live up to what society deems a necessary role for women to play. Women “should” be inseparable from their children, yet Helen portrays a sense of maternal burden. By writing her character this way, Braddon shows that women are often faced with difficult decisions, considering the pressure of gender expectations that leave them feeling trapped, and in some cases causing them to break down. From this perspective, Helen’s desertion of her child with the hope to improve her economic and social standing reveals several fears of women in the face of gender roles. Braddon, I believe, wanted to highlight this and challenge the stereotype through Helen Talboys. Of course, this would not traditionally be accepted by the society that makes up the audience for this novel. So, Braddon aligned this contradicting female character with mental instability, to make the desertion believable in a way that the audience might accept more willingly.

Contrary to Helen, Lucy Audley is a much stronger picture of a woman. As an ambitious woman, Lucy has conflicting identities, which was perceived as a very obvious mental disorder. So, her newfound independence, ambition, and drive to break with conventional gender roles are viewed as a woman in hysteria, falling into madness. Lucy clearly states her expectations for men and women that were obviously affected by the tragedy she perceived her old life to be. She claims that men are not capable of “deep and lasting affections.” She also said that it was “cruel” of Mrs. Talboys to die, and put George into such an upset. She shows a general understanding of how women were really to blame for such things, and that men were not known for their passions when it comes to women. This indicates a guilty conscience, blaming her own nature as a woman for such tragedies based on the womanly gender expectation of the time. She performs

to her new characterization as Lady Audley, a strong woman, that believes in gender roles according to her past experiences, and so, she is potentially afflicted with madness.

Madness is a key issue in this novel. Lady Audley and other characters often bring up the topic and discuss what madness truly means. Some readers see Lady Audley as insane, as she did kill George Talboys and declare herself mad, thus living in to her nature as a woman to be prone to insanity. “Lady Audley’s ‘insanity’ is necessary in order to constitute her a believable character, and this necessity reveals the extent of the Victorian reliance on gender roles for identity. This reliance was so strong that insanity became the only possible excuse for behavior that did not fit the mold,” (Hayes, 28). However, Lady Audley’s crime could also be an indication that she is not insane, but instead breaking out of the female stereotype to become a woman who takes control of her own life. Nevertheless, her character is powerful, and that challenges her gender expectation in itself. Her identity disorder is what marks her as insane.

Conclusion

In this time period, identity was closely tied with prescriptive gender roles. Society demanded cultural norms that were inflicted upon both men and women, and most acted in accordance with the expectation. Anyone who lacked the defining stereotypical demeanors were branded as abnormal, and sometimes that abnormality flourished into full insanity accusations. Braddon bends traditional gender roles in ways which align with themes of madness in order to challenge these cultural demands that Judith Butler describes as performative. Each character facing madness and loss of identity is an indication that preconceived notions of identity based on impossible ideals of gender may in fact be the cause of insanity. “Lady Audley, with all her flaws, is a perfect example of the damage that is done when an individual gives up his or her identity in the effort to conform to a social ideal,” (Hayes, 34). As Judith Butler, Mary Elizabeth

Braddon, and many others suggest, regulated discourses which dictate how we build our identity around prescribed gender roles can lead only to destruction.

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